P21 / Rethinking Positive Discrimination in a Changing World: From Group-Based Affirmative Action to Intersectional and Inclusive Public Policy

Topic : Equity, Gender, Inclusion and the Diversity in Public Policy

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

The purpose of this panel is to explore the development, impact and shortcomings of positive discrimination and affirmative action policies in various countries and policy contexts in a critical manner. It aims to conduct a comparative analysis of the various responses of states to historically deep-rooted inequalities by caste, race, ethnicity, gender, indigeneity and socioeconomic disadvantage and assess the effectiveness of current policy frameworks in the context of fast evolving patterns of exclusion.

The current body of knowledge about affirmative action and positive discrimination and social justice offers a critical backdrop to reimagining current strategies for inclusive public policy. Galanter (1984), Goldman (1979), Anderson (2004), Fredman (2011, 2022) and Khaitan (2015) provide foundationally important work on the normative, legal and institutional basis of group based affirmative action and its importance in redressing historical discrimination and structural inequalities. The debates on substantive equality, redistribution, recognition, participation and institutional change are also advanced by Young (1990), Fraser (2008), and Fredman (2016). Single-axis theoretical frameworks of inequality are confronted by the emergence of intersectionality as a critical analytical tool, most notably in Crenshaw (1989, 1991) and Collins (2000).Single-axis theorisations of inequality are challenged when intersectionality as a critical analytical framework emerges, most notably in Crenshaw (1989, 1991) and Collins (2000). Comparative scholarship is also provided by Kennedy-Dubourdieu (2006), Gururaj et al. (2021), Carvalho, Pradelski and Williams (2025) and Bengtson (2023), discussing the nature of affirmative action in diverse political and institutional settings, and the meaning of multidimensional identities for policy design, representation and inclusion.

One key goal is to consider a regular and evidence-based oversight of positive discrimination policies. New and evolving expressions of marginalisation related to migration and displacement, refugee status, LGBTQ+ identities, disability, statelessness, ethnicity, language and other axes of disadvantage are being lived by in contemporary societies. The panel will explore how public policy can address these developments while not overlooking historically entrenched structural inequalities.

The panel will also explore the participation of governance institutions, policy networks, civil society organizations, social movements and affected communities in the recognition and influence on inclusive policy responses to new forms of discrimination.

The panel will answer the following questions:

How has positive discrimination and affirmative action policies developed across the various national and regional contexts and what are the evidence for their effectiveness?
What are the key positive aspects, flaws and paradoxes of current affirmative action policies?
How well do traditional, collective models, address new and intersectional forms of disadvantage?
What is the role of migration, refugee status, LGBTQ+ identities, disability and other new aspects of marginalisation in addressing contemporary policy agendas of equity and inclusion?
5. What institutional arrangements should governments put in place to review periodically the categories and eligibility criteria of beneficiaries and policy instruments?
6. In what ways can intersectionality, good data and democratic participation help design and measure positive discrimination policies?
How do policy networks, civil society and cross-national coalitions help to uncover new inequalities and shape policy change?

The scientific value of the panel is the linkage of comparative public policy, social justice, governance and intersectionality, with a view to creating a more dynamic approach to the understanding of positive discrimination. Existing scholarship has focussed on the nature of affirmative action in specific national

contexts and there is still plenty of room for comparative study of the capacity for affirmative action to be flexible in the face of rapidly changing demographic and social dynamics.

CALL FOR PAPERS

We invite original research papers, comparative studies, policy analyses and theoretically informed contributions examining the evolution, effectiveness, challenges and future of positive discrimination and affirmative action policies across countries and regions.

Affirmative action has played a critical role in addressing historical and structural inequalities based on caste, race, ethnicity, gender, indigeneity and socioeconomic disadvantage. However, societies are undergoing significant demographic and social transformations. Migration, displacement, globalisation, changing understandings of gender and identity, and emerging forms of social exclusion are creating new and increasingly complex patterns of disadvantage.

This Call for Papers seeks contributions that critically examine whether existing affirmative action frameworks remain adequate to address these changing realities and how they can be reviewed, redesigned and strengthened.

We particularly welcome papers on:

(1) Comparative global experiences of affirmative action
(2) Caste, race, ethnicity and indigenous rights
(3) Gender equality and LGBTQ+ inclusion
(4) Migration, refugees and displacement
(5) Intersectionality and emerging forms of discrimination

The panel invites contributions that move beyond the conventional debate over whether affirmative action and positive discrimination are necessary, and instead examine how these policies can evolve to remain relevant, effective and equitable in a rapidly changing world. We particularly welcome research exploring how public policy can simultaneously address historical and structural injustices while responding to new and intersecting forms of marginalisation arising from migration, displacement, gender and sexual diversity, disability, ethnicity, socioeconomic inequality and other emerging vulnerabilities.

Contributions from diverse geographical, disciplinary and methodological perspectives are strongly encouraged, including comparative, empirical, legal, theoretical and policy-oriented approaches. The panel seeks to foster international dialogue on the design, evaluation and periodic review of inclusion policies, while examining the role of governments, civil society, policy networks and affected communities in shaping more responsive frameworks.

The ultimate aim is to advance innovative approaches to equity, inclusion, diversity, social justice and adaptive public governance.